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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000720

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/24/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#) [THIRDTERM](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TO RESHUFFLE CABINET AND PDP AFTER THIRD
TERM LOSS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Transcorp Director and Obasanjo insider Otunba Funso Lawal told the Consul General the President, stung by the third term amendment defeat, was planning to reshuffle his cabinet and the PDP machinery to reward the faithful and to bruise the indifferent and disloyal. By these moves, Obasanjo hopes to show that he has not lost his teeth, remains in control and that he should not be crossed. Turning more pessimistic, Lawal confided the President now realized Vice President Atiku wielded more influence in the Party than they had thought and still more than Obasanjo. Lawal said Obasanjo remained apoplectic about the Atiku Presidency. With the term extension dead for the present, Obasanjo hoped for an expedient partnership with former military head-of-state Babangida to pull Atiku out of the race once and for all. However, Obasanjo is also not enamored with Babangida and still has no successor in mind. End summary.

THIRD TERM LOSS DUE TO WEAK LEADERSHIP AND FRACTURED PARTY

2. (C) Otunba Funso Lawal, Transcorp board member and Obasanjo insider, initially told the Consul General Obasanjo was disappointed but was also taking the loss of this third term ambition in stride. As the conversation evolved, Lawal portrayed Obasanjo as a hurt and angry man searching for his bearings. Lawal said a group of Obasanjo insiders, mostly Transcorp directors, did a "post-mortem" on the failed third term amendment process. The third term agenda was not originally pushed by the President, but was instead the brainchild of Obasanjo straphangers like Greg Mbadiwe, claimed Lawal. Over time, the President became enthralled with the prospect of tenure extension. Since he jumped aboard a moving third term train, he made the fatal mistake of sticking with those who started the push. This mistake was compounded when the unpopular Ibrahim Mantu became his chief advocate in the Senate and Senator Mantu and the acerbic Femi Fani-Kayode, the President's public affairs specialist, became the chief public spokesmen for the third term project. If more respectable figures had taken a more active role, then Obasanjo would have had a better chance, rued Lawal.

3. (C) However, many people in Obasanjo's employ did not serve their boss, Lawal observed. Obasanjo's cabinet was split over the issue, claimed Lawal, and ministers such as Minister of Information Frank Nweke who should have openly supported the amendment were mute, and thus passively opposed. Still others surreptitiously undermined Obasanjo. Obasanjo was stung that several ministers chose the sidelines as their preferred location during the battle. In an attempt to regain the political initiative, Obasanjo was planning a major speech for May 29, Democracy Day. In that speech, Obasanjo will attempt to explain his position regarding the third term and assure Nigeria that he accepts the National Assembly verdict, Lawal indicated. However, Obasanjo is also contemplating a major cabinet reshuffle and might use the May 29 speech as a vehicle to announce it. Lawal predicted the reshuffling would reward those who supported the third term project. This has become a litmus test for Obasanjo, he added.

A WOUNDED PRESIDENT TO PURGE THE UNFAITHFUL

4. (C) Betraying that Obasanjo had not accepted the defeat of his post-2007 ambitions, Lawal stated Obasanjo was stunned that PDP members in the National Assembly did not endorse him. While they knew the battle would be tough, he did not

expect so many defectors. While implicitly acknowledging Obasanjo's camp might have passed money, he claimed Atiku and Babangida distributed cash to bolster anti-third term numbers in the Assembly.

15. (C) This revolt proves how much influence Vice President Atiku still retained in the party, continued Lawal. While Obasanjo controlled the national executive of the PDP, Atiku controlled the rank and file, Lawal asserted. He said Obasanjo would attempt to use a carrot-and-stick approach to try to gain control of the party but he feared that time was too limited for Obasanjo. Moreover, he admitted that Obasanjo had not yet decided on a course of action except that he wanted to thwart Atiku.

COMMENT

16. (C) Lawal was nonplused and, to some degree, his mood probably reflects the President's. Lawal had backed the third term attempt and apparently never considered the severe fall-out that would ensue should Obasanjo lose the gambit. While he said Obasanjo now would work toward reconciliation, the moves he described Obasanjo preparing to take spoke more to another "r" - revenge. What was more telling was Lawal's assertion that Obasanjo did not have a back-up plan and was now looking for one, but for the time being Obasanjo's lodestar was to stymie Atiku. End comment.

BROWNE